

A Not-So-Simple Solution

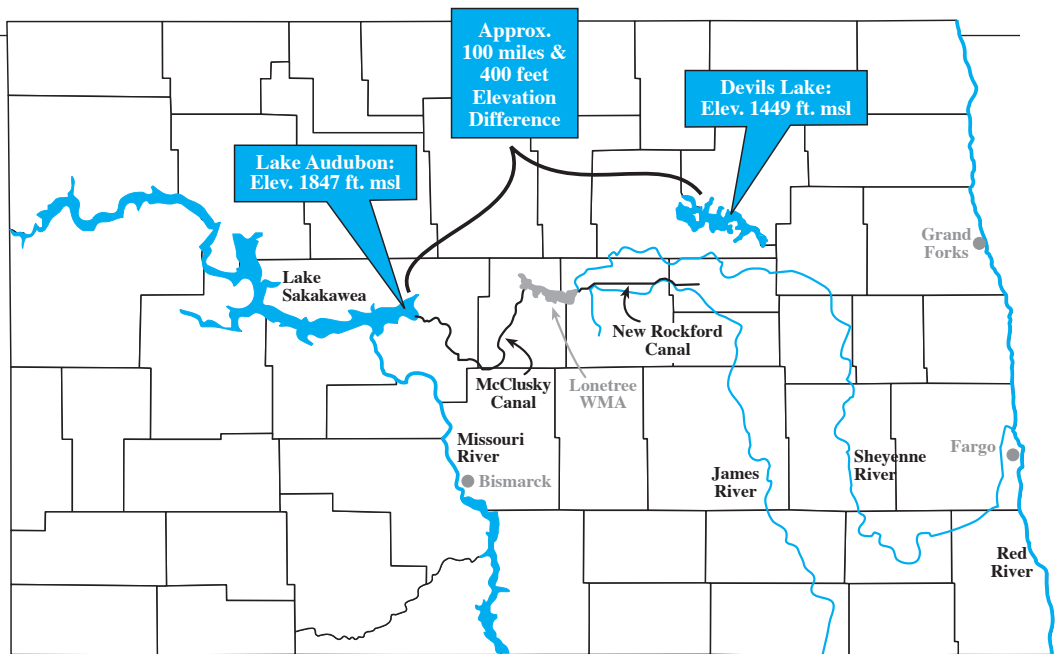
By Pat Fridgen

It's a common question that we hear at the State Water Commission and especially at public meetings on an increasing basis — "why can't you just transfer Devils Lake floodwater to the drought-stricken Missouri River system?" And actually, with Devils Lake at record high levels, and Lakes Sakakawea and Oahe at record low levels, the idea of transferring water from Devils Lake to the Missouri River system does seem to make a fair amount of sense at first glance. Consequently, we have considered that type of solution in the past, along with countless others to alleviate the flooding problems of the Devils Lake basin.

However, when we look at such an idea a little bit closer, it becomes quite apparent that an outlet from Devils Lake to the Missouri River system is not feasible to pursue for a number of reasons — even if we consider using the existing Garrison Diversion works.

- Geographically speaking, Devils Lake and Lake Audubon are about 100 miles apart, and there is about 400 feet of elevation difference between the two water bodies. Thus, the development of such a project would be incredibly expensive. (Consider the fact that the state's emergency Devils Lake outlet to the Sheyenne will cost about \$28 million to transfer water 14 miles.) In addition, operation and maintenance costs would be quite high.

- Use of the existing Garrison Diversion facilities would require extensive reconstruction, as the slope of the McClusky and New Rockford canals is west to east — not east to



west. In addition, there is still 20 miles between the two canals that would have to be connected — likely with pumps and pipeline in an effort to avoid environmental problems.

- It is very likely that Canada and Minnesota would object to such a project, as a Devils Lake to the Missouri River system diversion would cross the continental divide. Manitoba has already filed a lawsuit against the NAWs project that diverts treated water from Lake Sakakawea to Minot. Thus, they would certainly object to diverting untreated Devils Lake water through the Sheyenne River basin and into the Missouri River basin.

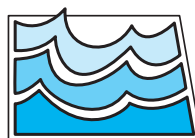
- Generally speaking, environmental concerns, and land acquisition difficulties alone would be extremely difficult and time consuming to overcome.

- Such a project would be ineffective in significantly helping the

Missouri system. For example, if we were to have operated a 100 cubic feet per second outlet all of May 2004, we would have removed about 6,138 acre-feet of water from Devils Lake. Last May (2003) alone, evaporation from Lake Sakakawea was 28,000 acre-feet (or about 4.5 times what a Devils Lake outlet could contribute).

- Even a 300 cubic feet per second outlet would have little impact on the Missouri River. Throughout most of the summer, 18,000 cubic feet per second are released from Garrison Dam, and 30,000 cubic feet per second from Gavins Point Dam in South Dakota.

Again, this is a common question that we have heard frequently here at the State Water Commission. But as the above information suggests, the many problems associated with such a project make it prohibitive to pursue.



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